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Heather MacLachlan
*University of Dayton*, hmaclachlan1@udayton.edu

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**Music and Incitement to Violence: Anti-Muslim Hate Music in Burma/Myanmar**

by Heather MacLachlan

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One of the world's greatest human rights crises is unfolding on the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar (a country also known as Burma).[1] Approximately one million people from the Rohingya ethnic group have fled Myanmar, settling into huge refugee camps near Cox's Bazar. Rohingya people, who are Muslim by faith, have been leaving Myanmar in great numbers since 2012, when anti-Muslim violence broke out in Rakhine State in the westernmost part of the country. The United Nations Fact Finding Mission which investigated this violence characterized these events as "gravest crimes" and concluded that they were committed with "genocidal intent" (Human Rights Council 2018:1, 16). Independent nation states and municipal authorities similarly criticized the Myanmar government - which oversees the national army judged responsible for most of the burnings, rapes, torture, and killings of Rohingya people - in the strongest of terms. The United States, for example, claimed that violence leveled against the Rohingya constituted "ethnic cleansing" (U.S. Department of State 2017). Canada's Senate made the unprecedented move of formally revoking the honorary Canadian citizenship earlier bestowed on Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's head of state, calling her "an accomplice of a genocide" (Harris 2018). For the same reason, both the city of Oxford (in the United Kingdom) and the city of Dublin (in the Republic of Ireland) revoked Suu Kyi's Freedom of the City awards (Grierson 2017; Kelly 2017). In this article I explain that the persecution of the

[1] The country was known as Burma until 1990, and as Myanmar after that. At the time of publication of this article, it is referred to in media and scholarly sources by both names. In this article, when referencing historical events or ideas before 1990, I write "Burma," and when referencing post-1990 events and ideas, I write "Myanmar." In a few instances, when referring to the long sweep of history, I write "Burma/Myanmar."

Rohingya, which captured the world's attention, is in fact only one outcome of a broadly dispersed and historically rooted prejudice against Muslims in Myanmar, a prejudice long held and promoted by members of the majority population, who are Theravada Buddhists. Secondly, I argue that contemporary popular music plays a role in fostering this prejudice. A small corpus of recently recorded songs, available throughout Myanmar via the internet, contain lyrics that articulate the main themes of the anti-Muslim ideology which undergirds the violence to which the Rohingya and other Myanmar Muslims have been subjected.[2] As the comments left by YouTube.com listeners make evident, the songs are well understood to be advocating hatred of Myanmar Muslims. Ultimately, this article argues that these songs are inciting persecution of Muslim people in Myanmar, and that the creators and distributors of the songs are therefore complicit in the ethnic cleansing and genocidal violence perpetrated against Muslims during the past decade.

It is my hope that this article will be of interest to ethnomusicologists who study music in all contexts, both inside and outside Southeast Asia. Ethnomusicologists are becoming more accepting of the possibility that our academic work can play a role in advocating for a more just world. One of the steps we take in acting for justice is to first identify and analyze situations that are unjust. As uncomfortable as it may be for scholars who - like me - are devoting their lives to the study and teaching of music, we must illuminate situations in which music plays a role in

[2] For the purposes of this research, I restrict my analysis to songs posted on YouTube.com. There are other Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs that circulate elsewhere on the internet. For example, a song called "Buddha's Tribe" is featured on the Facebook page for the Buddha Dhamma Parita Foundation, a group that is explicitly committed to "protecting" Buddhism from Muslims. This song repeats the same themes and garners the same kinds of responses from listeners (evident from comments on the Facebook page) as do the songs I describe in this article.

destroying human life and human potential. To understand how music can inflict damage is, in the long term, to work toward understanding how it can heal and uplift.

**Music and the incitement of violence**

In the twenty-first century, scholars of music began investigating how music is linked to violence. This line of inquiry represents an important turn for the field, especially for studies of popular music, the kind of music I analyze in this article. As Martin Cloonan and Bruce Johnson wrote in 2002, scholars of popular music through the twentieth century demonstrated "a tendency to represent popular music as a redemptive and emancipatory force which opposes conservative and historically entrenched music discourses, but to deny or ignore its darker side," consistently validating the premise that "popular music is universally a 'good thing'" (2002:28). In their article, Cloonan and Johnson documented examples of music being deliberately used to cause pain, as a form of "sonic aggression" and "oppression" (2002:32 and 34). Following this lead, Suzanne Cusick explained how extremely loud music was used by American soldiers as a component of harsh interrogation techniques in prison camps in Afghanistan, Iraq and Cuba (2008). Other scholars have analyzed situations in which the link between music and violence is less direct. For example, John McDowell's book about the tragic *corridos* of Mexico's Costa Chica showed that "the ballads composed and sung on the Costa Chica do contribute to the perpetuation of violence in this zone" (2000:6), although he acknowledged that it is impossible to claim that corridos are directly responsible for violent acts, because most listeners do not act out the violence they hear about in the corridos (2002:216). A number of other scholars have gone on to make the same nuanced conclusion, that is, that hateful lyrics contained in appealing musical packages can "shape our imaginary, our sense of the possible" (Johnson and Cloonon

2008:103) but generally cannot be shown to actually cause physical violence (see Kahn-Harris 2004:5, McDonald 2009:82, Sugarman 2010:33; Baker 2013).

As this literature has developed, calls have emerged for studies of how music does – or does not – incite physical violence, including in the pages of this journal (O'Connell 2011:118; see also O'Connell 2010:11). Here again Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan led the way, devoting an entire chapter in their 2008 book to "Music and Incitement to Violence." Johnson and Cloonan depend on the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of incitement; they therefore focus on lyrics which "urge or persuade [listeners] to act in a violent or unlawful way" (2008:95). The authors explain that lyrics which incite listeners to violence are found in children's playground songs, gangsta rap songs, hate music produced by neo-Nazi groups, and Jamaican ragga, concluding that "what appears to be incontrovertible is that pop and popular musics can and do 'incite' violence" (2008:122). They go on to delineate how music causes arousal, that is, involuntary but "measurable physiological symptoms" (2008:124), and can arouse "aggressiveness," but point out that even aggressive arousal is not usually discharged in violent action (2008:139). Jonathan Pieslak has also taken on the question of arousal caused by listening to music, finding that heavy metal and rap music were often listened to by American soldiers as an "inspiration for combat" (2009:46), and theorizing that the "relentlessness" of these musics facilitated a kind of trance, an altered state of mind necessary for killing (2009:164-167). In later work focused on violent radical groups, Pieslak concludes that music often functions to arouse emotion in its listeners: "The ability of music to invest the listener with emotion, at the possible expense of a rational contemplation of its message, may be one of the principal reasons why the art form has been afforded a prominent position in the propaganda efforts of almost every nationalist, religious, or ideologically driven group in history. Music can

represent the pinnacle of human artistic expression, or it can be commandeered to etch a particular message in one's mind by playing on emotional responses that can circumvent critical reflection on the message" (2015:238). However, Pieslak immediately followed this by denying that there is a clear causal relationship between music and physical violence, because "music does not affect all listeners in the same way" (2015:240).

In this article, I argue that music can indeed incite physical violence, and it is doing so in Myanmar today. Importantly, I do not claim that any person or group of persons in Myanmar ever listened to an inciting song and subsequently committed violence against Muslim victims as a direct result of being inspired by the song. I have no evidence of any such cause-effect relationship and have never heard of, nor read, reports of it. This reality in no way undermines my contention, however. The definition of incitement articulated by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) is the definition I rely on below, and as we will see, this definition expressly differentiates between inciting speech and later violent acts. The ICTR definition clearly reveals that "the fact that [a] message, widely diffused through [mass media], could not be directly tied to specific acts of killing would not absolve the message's master of the crime of genocide" (Gordon 2004:170). The stakes, therefore, are extremely high: when condemning certain instances of music-making as incitement to violence, I am simultaneously saying that the makers of this music are responsible for genocide.

One further, and important, caveat: Although this article strongly criticizes anti-Muslim hate songs, it does not argue that the songs' creators are solely, or even principally, responsible for the recent terrible persecutions of Muslims in Myanmar. I explicitly do not claim the songs are "a crucial factor in inciting" violence (as other hate music was found to be in the Rwandan genocide), but rather that they are one factor, and a factor that merits our scholarly attention

(McCoy 2019:420). It is impossible to quantify the songs' impact on Burmese listeners at large, and I acknowledge that, in comparison to the most popular of Burmese pop songs archived on YouTube.com, the songs under discussion here have comparatively few views. Anti-Muslim hate songs and the musicians who create them are not primarily, and arguably, not even very deeply culpable in recent crimes against humanity in Myanmar. Nevertheless, to the extent that the hate speech contained in the lyrics of these songs do incite violence - by influencing the thoughts of listeners and by contributing to an ongoing discriminatory discourse - the songs, I argue, must be taken seriously and subjected to rigorous academic analysis. "To recognize the importance of incitement in causing genocide is not to ignore the role played by longstanding racial and ethnic prejudices. Incitement does not necessarily induce people to act against their own beliefs; when hate speech incites, it does so because the listener is receptive to such speech. Nor does the incitement theory argue that people who participate in genocide may be absolved of responsibility because they lack the will to behave differently. It is simply to highlight the power of media-borne messages to influence people…." (Benesch 2004:63).

**Anti-Muslim Hate Songs**

The anti-Muslim hate songs (as I am labeling them) which are the focus of this article are: "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue;" "A New 969 Song;" "Brave-Hearted Man;" "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted;" and "Oath."[3] Inside Myanmar, "Oath" is the best-known anti-Muslim hate song, because it is often played at high volume over loudspeakers prior to anti-Muslim rallies. It is also the only song in this small corpus that has been discussed in the Western media (see Fuller 2013). These songs live primarily on the internet, where they are heard, commented upon, downloaded, and recommended to others, usually on Facebook, which

[3] See the Discography for the YouTube links to each of these songs.

is the most important and most-used form of internet communication in Myanmar. In Myanmar today, the internet is broadly accessible; indeed, there are villages across the country where villagers can and do easily use the internet, via their smartphones, but still lack interior plumbing. I chose to analyze anti-Muslim hate songs found on YouTube.com because the reactions of listeners - expressed in the comments posted beneath the videos - can be clearly linked to each individual song, and these reactions factor into my analysis below.

As scholars who have studied the White Power Movement in the United States argue, the fact that White Power music is available via the internet is important not only because the music can therefore be widely disseminated. Internet dissemination of hate songs also allows solitary listeners to participate in the "broad collective experience" of associating themselves with White Power ideas (Futtrell, Simi and Gottschalk 2006:286) and helps to "conjure emotions and ideas that nourish participants' identification with the collective 'we'" evoked in the songs (Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk 2006:296). The same is true in Myanmar: listening to anti-Muslim hate songs on the internet helps to reinforce listeners' notion that they belong to a collective of Buddhists who have a common interest, and more to the point, a common enemy in their Muslim countrymen. As is shown below, a majority of listeners who write YouTube comments about the songs openly affiliate themselves with precisely this way of thinking.

The songs in this corpus all belong to the broad category of popular music. Solo vocal lines are the musical focus in these songs and they articulate syllabic, engaging melodies organized in verse-chorus form. In all of the Burmese-language anti-Muslim hate songs, the singers are male; even the backup singers or choruses which appear briefly seem to be all-male. The lead vocal melodies are accompanied by the rock band instrumentarium (drum kit, electric guitars and keyboards), or by digital simulacra of these instruments. Some of the songs sound

like they were recorded in professional recording studios and feature virtuosic instrumental playing. "Big-Hearted Man," for example, features a soaring electric guitar and a drum kit which plays a flourish of fills just before cadence points. Other songs sound like they were recorded by amateurs, possibly using the microphones built into their laptop computers. "A New 969 Song," for example, features a guitar playing only four chords, and a muffled-sounding vocalist singing a repetitive melody, noticeably straining his voice to hit the highest notes. "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue," similarly, includes a muffled sung vocal part accompanying a rapped vocal line, and instrumental sounds that likely come from a single synthesizer. When the two vocal lines converge briefly, at 1:49 in the recording, they are out of tune with each other.

While the quality of the recordings varies, all anti-Muslim hate songs belong to a genre of music immediately recognizable to, and appreciated by, Burmese people since the late 1960s (MacLachlan 2011:7-8). And this matters because, as scholar Jason McCoy found in his analysis of hate songs played on Rwandan national radio prior to the Rwandan genocide, embedding hateful lyrics in Western-sounding popular music is central to the appeal of the songs. Western pop music was not only well-known among Rwandan people, it was also associated with transnational political, economic and ideological dominance, "and thus, normalcy" (2009:94). The normalcy of the sound of the songs effectively "dampened the extremity of the rhetoric" and made the message of the lyrics "more subversively palatable" (2009:93). Presenting the hateful rhetoric in this appealing way "legitimated the rhetoric, and in turn, the behavior for which it called" (2009:94). In Myanmar, two decades after the Rwandan genocide, we are seeing the same phenomenon - appealing pop songs which strongly stigmatize a minority group and call for discriminatory action to be taken against that group.

The most salient feature of Burmese-language anti-Muslim hate songs, in my view, is their frequent use of repetition. In pop song form, of course, the chorus is usually repeated, and that is the case in all of these songs. But the repetition in some anti-Muslim hate songs also extends to the phrase level, meaning that short phrases are immediately repeated. The repeated phrases sometimes sound like call-and-response, because the first iteration is sung by a soloist, and the second is sung by (what sounds like) a chorus. This kind of repetition is especially evident in "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted" and "Oath." In both of those songs, the repeated phrases are often very short, consisting of just three to five pitches. The result of this kind of musical construction is that listeners can easily sing along; they can echo the simple phrases they have just heard, keeping in time with the lead singer as he moves on to the next short phrase. Making anti-Muslim hate songs easy to sing along with increases the chance that listeners will actively participate in the songs, articulating their messages in their own voices. It therefore heightens the possibility that listeners will actively associate themselves with the collective of Buddhists who are the subject of, the narrators of, and the intended audience of, anti-Muslim hate songs.

Readers will note that my descriptions of Burmese anti-Muslim hate songs are somewhat guarded; I write that all the singers of these songs "seem to be" men, for example. My analysis of the songs does not include ethnographic findings from the creators of these songs - although it is not for lack of trying that these findings are absent. When I first became interested in these songs, in early 2018, I was teaching at a university in Yangon (the largest city in Myanmar). I had not yet heard any of the songs, but I was aware of their existence. I asked my students - intelligent and energetic young people, one and all - for help in locating recordings of the songs, but they all claimed ignorance. Later, after I had located the recording of "Oath," I played it in an

open area; two students passing by heard the recording and sang along (field notes, March 22, 2018). The students then acknowledged that they did know this particular song, but continued to deny any further knowledge of any other anti-Muslim hate songs. I observed this kind of denial in dozens of potential informants during subsequent months. I was able to identify some listeners of these songs, and I tracked down contact information for some of the usernames employed by those who posted the songs on YouTube.com. ("A New 969 Song," for example, was posted by an association of the same name, and the association is also listed as the performer of the song). However, in all but two cases (two adult men who had downloaded one or more of these songs on their cellphones), every person I contacted denied knowing anything about the songs and/or said they were unwilling to grant me an interview (personal communication, Aung Maung, April 10, 2018; personal communication, Thang Ngat, April 27, 2018). One of the most vivid examples of the denial of knowledge of this repertoire occurred when a young woman told me that her mother sang "a song that says something like, 'Don't buy from Muslims'" to the mother's students at *dhamma* school (interview, Thazin Thin, March 20, 2018). (Dhamma schools are Buddhist Sunday schools for children). I asked the woman to phone her mother to confirm the lyrics of the song. In my hearing, the woman's mother initially acknowledged that she knew the song to which her daughter referred, and said that she taught it to students because "it is part of the curriculum" of the dhamma school. However, the mother subsequently called back, insisting that the opposite was true: the song, she said, was not part of the curriculum, and she herself never sang it.

I had many similar experiences, with people from all walks of life, including a Buddhist monk (personal communication, Ashin Uttama, May 29, 2018).[4] Finally, my study became focused on the songs as I found them on YouTube.com, and on the comments that listeners left underneath. This project is therefore an example of a "fully online research" project, in which I was a "non-participant observer," reading and listening to public online communications without interacting with those communicators (Przybylski 2021:26). Ultimately I decided that this was sufficient, because investigating the motivations and actions of specific people involved in anti-Muslim hate songs would be of limited value. Hateful texts, such as the words in these songs, derive their power to incite violence because they are part of a much wider and historically rooted discourse which gives particular resonance to words, such as ethnic or racial slurs (Butler 1997:51). It is therefore impossible to identify any particular producer or consumer of hateful speech (such as a composer, performer, or listener) as singularly responsible for the harm caused by the hateful lyrics in a song - and it would be somewhat beside the point, because the prejudiced and discriminatory ideas distilled in a song are so widely held and promoted (Butler 1997:52). The twenty-first century anti-Muslim hate songs that are the focus of this article are part of a long and terrible history of Islamophobia in Burma/Myanmar.

**Muslims and Islamophobia in Myanmar**

The large majority of the population of the country of Myanmar are Theravada Buddhists. However, minority religions, including animism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam have many adherents in Myanmar, and generally, in urban areas, these various religious groups have coexisted peacefully. The largest city in Myanmar is Yangon, and residents of Yangon are

[4] Note that sociologists attempting to research the music of the White Power movement in the United States faced similar difficulties (Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk 2006:280).

proud to point out that the city center, where a large roundabout is located, exemplifies their history of religious diversity. Clustered around City Hall, several large religious buildings stand: the Sule Pagoda, the Immanuel Baptist Church, and the Sunni Jameh Mosque. It is worth mentioning that the respect shown by many Burmese people to those of other religious backgrounds is genuine, and there are many - some of whom I have met - who reject the anti-Muslim discourse circulating in their country. To give just one example: the Buddhist monk who is the leading figure in Myanmar's anti-Muslim movement, U Wirathu, has been sharply and publicly criticized by other monks for engaging in "hate speech," and was even banned from preaching for one year, from March 2017 to March 2018, by Myanmar's highest governing authority for Buddhism (Htun Khaing 2018). Indeed, there is even a pop song, found on YouTube, that criticizes U Wirathu and urges listeners, "Let's fight Wirathu."[5] With that said, Islamophobia is alive and well in Myanmar, and I argue that this prejudice is a result of the ethnonationalism (which is to say, the racism) that pervades Myanmar society, and which informs citizens' understanding of group identities.

Religious adherence in Myanmar tends to overlap with ethnic identity. Buddhists in Myanmar are mostly members of the Myanmar *lu-myo*, or ethnic group; in English this ethnic group is known as Burman. On the other hand, the Chin *lu-myo* and the Kachin *lu-myo* are over ninety percent Christian, as are large numbers of the Karen *lu-myo*. It was during colonial times, when waves of Christian conversion began, but remained almost entirely restricted to members of ethnic minorities, that Burmese people began to repeat the aphorism, "To be Burman is to be Buddhist" (Schrober 2011:2). Many – though definitely not all – of the Muslims in Myanmar are members of other ethnic groups, groups which are descended from ancestors who originated

[5] See the discography for the link to this song, which is titled "Wirathu."

in India. In other words, they are of the South Asian, rather than of the Southeast Asian, phenotype (Yegar 1972:13). South Asians tend to be taller than Southeast Asians, and they tend to have darker skin. One Burmese word for such people is *kala lu-myo*; this word can mean, "person with dark skin," or "Indian," or "Muslim" (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015:56).

Burmese people tend to conflate the adherents of Islam with people who appear to be of South Asian descent; they often use the term kala lu-myo to describe both groups. There is a growing consensus that the word kala is a deeply pejorative term (Metro 2016:221; Robinne 2016:349), so much so that in June 2012 three state-owned newspapers published "corrections" (but not apologies) for having printed the word kala (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2015:56).[6] Today Muslims constitute approximately four percent of the population of Myanmar; this percentage is approximate because some Muslims, including most Rohingya people, have been denied National Registration identification cards and are therefore not included in the official population count (Wade 2017:49).

Islam has a long presence in Myanmar, particularly in the western part of the country (Yegar 1972). This history is deeply contested, with pro-Muslim writers stating that it can be traced back one thousand years. Jacques Leider points out that the most reliable historical sources suggest that large numbers of Muslims from Bengal, India, settled in what is now Rakhine State in Myanmar between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Leider 2016:166-167). It seems clear that large numbers of Muslims from India came to Myanmar both before and after British colonization, which began in the early nineteenth century. Thant Myint-U, writing about the first British colonial incursions into Burma, which began in 1824, argues that "all

[6] Facebook, for its part, banned the use of this word in May 2017 (Irrawaddy 2017).

subsequent nationalist thinking harks back to this moment, when the empire was brought to its knees by invaders from the west, as the beginning of an alien interregnum" (2020:15). The idea that foreigners from the west - that is, kala lu-myo - are determined to undermine and take control of Burma's great Buddhist civilization is the "nationalist mythology [that has] been taught in schools or universities for generations" (Thant Myint-U 2020:188; Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2020).

Knowing that this understanding of history is predominant among Burman Buddhists explains why they originally applied the word kala to their British overlords. In the twentieth century, the foreigners from the west - the kala lu-myo of the Burman imagination - became the Indian immigrants who arrived in great numbers; by 1921 there were one million Indians (about half of whom were Muslims) among the eleven million Burmans of Burma (Yegar 1972:31). Although many Indian immigrants worked as unskilled and poorly-paid laborers, many others worked in the British colonial government offices. The urban Muslim Indians established mosques and madrassas, making themselves and their non-Buddhist faith visible in the important population centers. "The conspicuous concentration of Indians in [the capital city of] Rangoon and in other urban areas helped confirm the Burmese impression that the immigrants were dispossessing them of their country" (Yegar 1972:32). One sub-group of the Indian immigrants, Chettiars from Tamil Nadu (who were Hindus), established a vast money-lending system in colonial Burma. In various parts of the country, Chettiar moneylenders controlled between seventy and one hundred percent of all the capital that was borrowed by Burmese citizens (Turnell 2009:18). Although the Chettiars were eventually expelled from Burma, their memory lives on; they – and by extension all the members of the remaining kala lu-myo – continue to be

a deeply resented group in the minds of many contemporary Burmese people (Turnell 2009:13; also Brant 1954:32).

"Rampant xenophobia" is a persistent problem in Myanmar (Robinne 2016:349); it is not an accident that the country's 2008 constitution withholds the presidency from any citizen who is the child of, the spouse of, or the parent of, a foreigner.[7] Prejudice against Muslims, specifically, requires a further explanation. I contend that this prejudice has little, if anything, to do with opposition to Islam. Indeed, most Burmese people have an extremely limited knowledge of the tenets of the Muslim faith. Rather, anti-Muslim prejudice is largely based on a racist ideology which claims that the kala lu-myo, an ethnic group with a different skin pigmentation than that of Buddhist Southeast Asians, are outsiders and aliens; for this reason, Reneaud Egreteau characterizes it as "Indophobia" (2011).[8] This racist idea is augmented by a longstanding class-based resentment, which has, for two centuries and more, identified "foreigners" as "the precipitators of economic devastation" (Prasse-Freeman and Phyo Winn Latt 2018:407). Ultimately, this way of thinking concludes that the kala lu-myo are the enemies of the majority Buddhist population, and are determined to take political and economic control over the country, just as their ancestors once did. Disturbingly, other scholars have noted that the two intertwined strains of the ideology I have outlined here are found in other parts of Southeast Asia, where "black" skin is a stigmatizing feature (High 2014:70-72) and where recent manifestations of anti-

[7] This constitutional requirement explains why Aung San Suu Kyi, although she is the most powerful civilian in the country and the head of the party holding the majority of the seats in the Hluttaw, or Parliament, did not hold the title of "President." She was once married to a British citizen, and her two sons are British citizens.

[8] In 2010, Myanmar's consul general in Hong Kong, Ye Myint Aung, said publicly that Rohingya people are not one of Myanmar's ethnic groups (rather, that they are illegal immigrants from Bangal), and that this is evident in their skin color and their ugliness (Thant Myint-U 2020:128).

Muslim hatred are the result of their status as a minority group that is "dominant [or perceived to be dominant] in the economic sphere" (Osman 2017:17).

Anti-Muslim prejudice in Burma/Myanmar has repeatedly led to outbreaks of violence against Muslims. Anti-Indian riots flared up in 1930 and again in 1938 in the capital city; during the 1938 events "hundreds were wounded and killed, millions of rupees' worth of property was damaged and 113 mosques were set afire" (Yegar 1972:37). In 1978, a "pogrom" against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State forced 200,000 Rohingya refugees to flee to Bangladesh (Wade 2017:92). In March of 1997, Buddhist monks in Mandalay "went on a rampage, vandalizing mosques and desecrating Korans" (Matthews 1999:50). Beginning in 2012, extreme violence has been leveled against Muslims in towns and cities across the country; the violence committed against Rohingya Muslims living in the far west is the most devastating, but by no means the only, instance of contemporary anti-Muslim activity in Myanmar (Wade 2017:137-142; Cheesman 2017:336-338). Importantly, twenty-first century manifestations of anti-Muslim violence arose at the same time as national organizations focused on the "protection" of Buddhism. These organizations, led and promoted by charismatic Buddhist monks, have established dhamma schools, have lobbied for legal restrictions to be placed on Muslims by state and national governing bodies, and have held large, public rallies dedicated to furthering "the narrative that posits Buddhism as under threat from Islam" (Walton 2014; Hayward and Frydenlund 2019:2-4).

Scholars of the history of anti-Muslim violence in Burma/Myanmar argue that the occurrences of the twenty-first century are fundamentally different from earlier outbreaks. Peter Coclanis, for example, says that the "sectarian conflict" of the twenty-first century is "now more akin to terrorism" (2013:29). Min Zin argues that anti-Muslim riots and conflicts of earlier times

"tended to be one-time events;" what distinguishes the violent actions of the last decade is that they are perpetrated and "sustained over time as a series of organized campaign [sic]" (2015:378). Min Zin goes on to explain that the "organized campaign" of the past decade is fueled by "a new variable, which is undeterred propagation of hate speech coupled with clear political coordination. Unlike under previous regimes, where anti-Muslim hate speech was word-of-mouth propaganda manufactured by military intelligence officers or underground publications, people can now hear vitriolic attacks against Muslims in [Buddhist] religious sermons from the intrusive loudspeakers of local monasteries or donation stations. People encounter hate speech in books and handouts, watch it on DVDs that are conveniently available from sellers at almost every traffic junctions [sic], and on social media" (2015:378-379; see also Brac de la Perrière 2016:334). "Spectacular pictures" of violent scenes, attributed to Muslims with "extreme bias" in social media postings, most especially, are crucial in persuading "large numbers of people that Buddhism [is] in danger, and that action [is] needed in its defense" (van Klinken and Su Mon Thazin Aung 2017:367). Burmese-language hate speech on social media has even become a focus of concern in the United States. In April 2018 Mark Zuckerberg, the Chief Executive Officer of Facebook, was called to testify before the United States Congress, and was grilled about his company's hosting of thousands of Burmese-language anti-Muslim texts and videos (Stecklow 2018). As the previous two paragraphs demonstrate, scholars of Burma/Myanmar and concerned parties worldwide have been attentive to the important role that hate speech, especially that disseminated by Facebook, is playing in anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar. None, however, have acknowledged that the post-2012 anti-Muslim discourse is also present in popular songs, nor that these songs are hosted on YouTube, a social media giant which

has never been held to account for its role in fostering the prejudice that underpins the recent violence.

**Anti-Muslim Discourse in Burmese Language Hate Songs**

Burmese language hate songs express the anti-Muslim ideology - the hate speech described by Min Zin, above - that has been publicly preached by Buddhist monks since 2012, disseminated by lay Buddhist organizations, and believed by Buddhists across Myanmar. The best-known of these monks, mentioned above, is U Wirathu. He is a fiery preacher who is extolled and praised in the song "Brave-Hearted Man," in which the singer repeats the name "Wirathu" over and over during the chorus:

ရန် စွယ် တွေ မထား အနရာယ်တွေကြား ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေး တံခါးတွေ ဖွင့် မဲ့သူ

Yaan hcwal tway mahtarr antayaltwaykyarr ngyaimchamyayy tanhkarrtway hpwint metsuu

Amidst the dangers, without anger, he will open the door of peace

ဒီ ကမာမြေ တစ်လွှား သူလိုလူ ရှား

De kabarmyay tatlwhar suuloluu sharr

It is so rare to come across someone like him in this world

နှလုံးသား ရဲ ရင့် မှု တွေ ပြမဲ့ သူ

Nhalonesarr yell yint mhu tway pya maesuu

Someone who has a courageous heart

As we will see, this song also refers to the broader themes that recur constantly in the Burmese anti-Muslim discourse. These four themes are:

Citizenship in Myanmar, Burman ethnicity, and adherence to Buddhism are inextricably linked - and therefore, Muslims do not belong (or should not belong) to the Myanmar nation

Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs advance an exclusionary ideology, a way of thinking that "excludes categories of people defined in terms of class, belief, or ethnicity from the universe of obligation" (Harff and Gurr 1998:561). In Myanmar, this exclusionary ideology proclaims that Muslim people should be excluded from the country, both legally and physically. More specifically, the Myanmar version of exclusionary ideology is an ethnonationalist ideology which assumes that the nation state is - or should be - the domain of one ethnic group, that of the Burman majority. Burman ethnicity, or *Myanma lu-myo* is, in this way of thinking, coterminous with adherence to Buddhism, such that "to be Burman is to be Buddhist," as the old slogan says. It is this simplistic conviction that fuels the sense that Muslim people do not belong in the nation of Myanmar. Recent scholarship on the rapidly-changing situation in Myanmar points out that even as the country is emerging from its long and destructive period of political isolation, this exclusionary ideology has increased in power - perhaps in response to "dissatisfaction with modernization" (Thant Myint-U 2020:208).

Charles Carstens has recently documented the emergence of a new way that some Myanmar Buddhists identify themselves, as *Buddha-batha-lu-myo*, meaning that they are of "Buddhist-ethnicity" (2018:127-128). As Carstens points out, "self-identifying with Buddhist-ethnicity makes a political intervention...Buddhist-ethnicity marshals private citizens to stand in unity and security. Bound by a common religion...differences among Buddhists are made irrelevant. This group is set against a racialized non-Buddhist outsider," which is, of course, the

Muslims of Myanmar (2018:129).[9] The ethnonationalist ideology that excludes Muslims from Myanmar is widespread among private citizens, and it is reinforced by government apparatuses. Carstens recounts the experience of a Burman Muslim man who applied for a National Registration identification card, writing "Myanmar" in the space for ethnicity, and "Muslim" in the space for religion. When the card was issued to him, he discovered that his ethnicity was listed as "Pakistan;" apparently the clerk who processed his application could not or would not accept the reality that a person of Muslim faith can simultaneously be of the Burman Myanmar ethnicity (2018:128). As François Robinne summarizes, "for the Burmese government, being Muslim is tantamount to being Indian, that is to say, being Kala" (2016:352).

Here is how the exclusionary ideology is expressed in song - note the strong "us versus them" language, in which "we" and "our" are always understood to mean Myanmar Buddhists, and "they" and "their" always refers to Muslims:

တို့ မြေပေါ်နေ တို့ ရေကိုသောက် တို့မြေအောက် တို့စီးပွား တို့ သမိုးရည်းစား မ ထောက် ညှာ စော်ကား

Thoet myaypawnay thoet yaykosout thoetmyayaout thoethceepwarr thoet sameeraeehcarr ma htout nyhar hcawkarr

They live on our land and drink our water. They use our underground resources and our businesses. They insult our girlfriends.

အိမ်ရှင် ပြစ်မှား အခက် ကို ချိုးသွား

Aainshin pyitmhar aahkaat ko hkyoeswarr

They insult the host and attack

[9] The slippage between ethnic or racial identification and religious adherence can be seen in a recent publication by a Burman author, who writes of Myanmar's "Buddhist race" (Nyi Nyi Kyaw 2020:199 and 217).

ကျေးဇူး မ ထောက်တဲ့ လူ့အတများ

Kyaayyjuu ma htouttae lhu attamyarr

Ungrateful egoistic people

(from “Oath”)

တိုင်းရင်းသား ထဲ မှာ မူဆလင် ဆိုတာ တစ်ယောက်မှ မပါဘူး

Tineyinnsarr htel mhar muusalin sotar tatyoutmha maparbhuu

There are no Muslims among the ethnic groups [of Myanmar]

ဒါ ကြောင့် ငါတို့ ပြည် မှာ မူဆလင်တွေ ရှိ မ နေ သင့် ဘူး

Dar kyaung ngarthoet pyi mhar muusalintway shi ma nay sint bhuu

Therefore, there should be no Muslims in our country

(from “Losing One’s Nationality is a Concerning Issue”)

နွား ကွဲတော့ ကျား ဝင် ဆွဲမယ်လေ

Nwarr kwaltot kyarr win swalmaallay

If the cows are divided, the tiger will take advantage of them (an idiomatic expression meaning, a kingdom divided cannot stand)

စည်း လုံး မှု နဲ့ အမျိုးကို စောင့် ထိန်းလေ

Hcaee lone mhu nae aamyoeko hcawng hteinlay

Keep the nation unified

သွေး မ ကွဲနဲ့ လက်တွေ့ တွဲ ထားလေ

Sway ma kwalnae laattway twal htarrlay

Work together and do not be distrustful

ရန်သူ မှန်သမျှ ဂရု မ ထူး တိုက်ထုတ်အဝေး

Yaansuu mhaansamyaha garu ma htuu tite htote aawayy

Fight all enemies ruthlessly

(from "A New 969 Song")

Buddhism and Buddhist people must be protected, with force if necessary

The second major theme in the Burmese anti-Muslim discourse is that Buddhist people and the religion to which they adhere are under threat. The threat posed by Muslims to Buddhists comes in many forms, as a Buddhist monk told me: the "real goal" of the kala, he said, is to poison the lime powder that Burmese people mix with the betel nuts they chew daily (interview, U Meitiya, April 14, 2018). He pointed out that "many people" believe that "Muslim countries" poison the powder before exporting it to Myanmar. But, the monk continued, ultimately the kala will prevail by growing their population and thereby "extinguishing" the Myanmar people. The anti-Muslim discourse to which this monk was happy to contribute insists on this point: Burman Buddhists are going to lose their majority position in the population - and therefore their political and religious dominance – as Muslim people reproduce more rapidly. Furthermore, the discourse proclaims that Buddhist people will undergo forced conversions to Islam, and Buddhism will therefore disappear.

Myanmar Buddhists are inclined to believe that Muslims are united in opposition to Buddhists because they have seen the numbers 786 posted in Muslim-owned shops around the country. The numbers refer to the numerical value (as calculated in the Arabic Abjad system) of the words in the opening sentence of the Koran (Coclanis 2013:27). However, Buddhist monks teach that these numbers are code for the year 2021, or for the twenty-first century (because 7 plus 8 plus 6 equals 21), and that they refer to a Muslim conspiracy to take control of the country in the near future. Another monk named named Ashin Pyinya Siri explained this to me himself, insisting that he had observed the plot succeeding in a village near Tagyi: A Buddhist woman married a Muslim man, he said, and they had nine children. Seven of the children became Muslims themselves, and now the village has a population of hundreds of Muslims; they have even built their own mosque (personal communication, March 22, 2018). “This is the way Muslims take over,” he said, “they demand their own space and their own rights.” The monk went on to defend U Wirathu, saying that “he has good intentions.” Myanmar Buddhists take the teachings of monks very seriously, so when monks promote conspiracy theories claiming that Buddhism and Buddhists are in need of protection, they find listening ears. Anti-Muslim hate songs emphasize and extend the monks’ allegations:

ပေါင်း ခြင်း က ၇ ၈ ၆ သုံးလုံး ရဲ့အဓိပ္ပါယ်

Paung chinn ka khun shit chout sonelone yae aadhi paal

The meaning of the sum of seven, eight and six

၂၁ ရာ စု လို့ အတိအကျ သိရတယ်

Hnit sat tit yar hcu lhoet aatiaakya sirataal

Is exactly twenty-one

၂၁ ရာ စု အကုန်မှာ ဗမာ တွေကို ပျောက် လို့ ကို ရည် ရွယ် ထား တဲ့ ရည် ရွယ် ချက် က သူတို့ လူမျိုး ရောက် ဖို့ တဲ့

Hnit sat tit yar hcu aakonemhar bamar twayko pyaut lhoet ko yi yawl htarr tae yi yawl chat ka suuthoet luumyoe yout phoet tae

[The Muslims are] aiming that by the end of the 21st century, the Burmese will be gone and their people will remain

ဒီ အ ချိန် မှာ တွေ့ ရ လိမ့်မယ် တစ် နိုင် ငံ လုံး ၇ ၈ ၆

De aah chain mhar twae ya laimmaal ta nine ngan lone khun shit chout

At that time, you will see 786 nationwide

ငါတို့ ဗမာ လူမျိုး ပျောက် အောင် ကြံ စည် လိမ့်မယ် သူ တို့ နောက်

Ngarthoet bamar luumyoe pyaut aaung kyaan hci laimmaal suu thoet nout

After this, they will try to get rid of our Burmese people

အင် အား များ ရင် ဆင် နွှဲ လိမ့်မယ် စစ်ပွဲ နာမည် ကျီဟတ်

Ain aarr myar yin sin nwhael laimmaal hcitpwal narmai gyehaat

When they become strong, they will declare Jihad [war]

ငယ် ငယ် ထဲ က လေ့ ကျင့် ထားတယ်၊ ဘာ သား စားစား လည်ဖြတ်

Ngaal ngaal htel ka lay kyint htarrtaal bhar sarr hcarrhcarr laihpyat

Trained from the young age how to cut throats,

ကလေး ကလေး ချင်း သတ်၊ လူကြီး လူကြီး ချင်းသတ်

Kalayy kalayy chinn saat luukyee luukyee chinnsaat

Their children will kill children. Adults will kill adults.

ဒီ ဖြစ်ရပ် ဒီ ဖြစ်ရပ်၊ တကယ်ကြီးတွေ ဖြစ် ခဲ့ ပြန်

De hpyityat de hpyityat takaalkyeetway hpyit hkae pyan

This incident, this incident, it has happened before:

နိုင် ငံ နာမည် အတိအကျ ပြောတော့ အာဖဂန် နစ် စတန်

Nine ngan narmai aatiaakya pyawwtot aarhpagaan nit hcataan

The exact name of the country is Afghanistan.

(from “Losing One’s Nationality is a Concerning Issue”)

တခြား ဘာသာ တိုးတက်ရေးကို တခြား သူများ ဆောင်ရွက်ပြီ

Tahkyarr bharsar toetaatrayyko tahkyarr suumyarr saungrwatpye

Others have made progress in their own religions

ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ တို့တတွေ များက သွေး အေးလို့ မ နေ သင့်ပြီ

Buddhabharsar thoettatway myarrka sway aayylhoet ma nay singpye

Buddhists should not be cold-hearted [meaning, unconcerned]

သွေး အေးနေ ရင် သာသနာ ပျောက်လို့ လူမျိုး ပျောက် ဖို့ ကြုံ လိမ့်မည်

Sway aayynay yin sarsanar pyautlhoet luumyoe pyaut phoet kyone laimmye

If one is cold-hearted, the religion will be lost and the nation will be lost

(from “You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted”)

Responding to the alleged threat to Buddhism and Buddhist people, some of the songs urge Buddhists not only to “work together” but to fight - that is, to engage in physical conflict with the enemies of Buddhism. “Losing One’s Nationality is a Concerning Issue” actually acknowledges that physical violence is forbidden to Buddhists:

မား နဲ့ ခုတ် တုတ် နဲ့ ရိုက် ဒီ အလုပ် တွေ ကို ဘုရား မ ကြိုက်

Dharr nae hkote tote nae yite de aalote tway ko bhayarr ma kyaite

Buddha [also translated as God] does not like stabbing nor hitting

However, the song then goes on to say:

ဘာ သာ တ ရား ကို ထိန်း သိမ်း လာ တဲ့ တို့ ရဲ့ အဘိုး အဘွား

Bhar sar ta yarr ko htein saim lar tae thoet yae aabhoe aabhwarr

Our grandparents preserved the [Buddhist] religion

တို့ ခေတ် မှာ လည်း မပျောက်ပျက် အောင် အ သက် နဲ့ လဲပြီး ကြိုး စား

Thoet hkit mhar laee mapyautpyet aaung aa saat nae lellpyee kyaoe hcarr

In our day too, we shall try to preserve it even if we must wager our lives

ငါ တို့ သွေး နဲ့ ရေး ခဲ့ တဲ့ ငါ တို့ ရဲ့ သာသနာ အ ရေး

Ngar thoet sway nae yayy hkae tae ngar thoet yae sarsanar aa yayy

Our religion is written in our blood

(from “Losing One’s Nationality is a Concerning Issue”)

နိုးထတော့ တို့မြန်မာတွေ

Noehtatot thoetmyanmartway

Wake up, our Myanmar people!

ငါတို့အရိုး စည်း ရိုးထိုး ၍ ကာ သင့် လျှင် ကာ ရ မည်

Ngarthoetaayoe hcaee yoehtoe yway kar sing hlyin kar ya mye

We shall build a fence out of our bones should it be needed

(from “Oath”)

Listeners should not marry Muslims

In light of the demographic threat that Muslims purportedly pose to Buddhists, anti-Muslim discourse in Myanmar exhorts Buddhists not to marry Muslims, that is, not to cooperate with the Muslim conspiracy aiming to overtake the country in the twenty-first century.[10] This discourse argues that in order to reduce the Muslim population in Myanmar, the majority population should deprive them of marriage partners. Marrying a Muslim, in this understanding,

[10] The fear that Buddhist women, especially, could be harmed by marriage with Muslim men may have some historical purchase. One of the causes of the “hatred” that led to the anti-Indian riots of 1938 was the situation of thousands of Buddhist women who married Muslim Indian immigrants and were subsequently abandoned by their husbands. These women discovered too late that they had no inheritance or legal protection when their marriages ended (Yegar 1972:32-33).

amounts to a betrayal of Buddhism and of the Myanmar people. Anti-Muslim hate songs state this explicitly:

ပိုက်ဆံ ဘယ်လောက် ကြီး ချမ်းသာ ချမ်းသာ လက် မ ထပ် ကြနဲ့

Pitesan bhaallout kyeeh chamsar chamsar laat ma htat kyanae

Don't get married to them, no matter how much money they have

လက် ထပ် လိုက် ရင် နင့်ကို ခေါ်မယ် 'အမျိုး ဖျက် မ' တဲ့

Laat htat lite yin ning ko hkawmaal 'aamyoe hpyet ma' tae

If you get married [to a Muslim] you will be called 'anti-nationalist' (also translated as 'ethnic prostitute')

(from "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue")

အား လုံး သော ညီ အစ် ကို မောင် နှ မ တွေ

Aarr lone saw nye aat ko maung nha ma tway

All brothers and sisters

ကိုယ့် အမျိုးသား ချင်း ပဲ ဘဝကို မွေးကြလေ

Koh aamyoesarr hcinn pell bhawako mway kyalay

Live among your own people (also translated as:  Marry your fellow Buddhists)

နှလုံး သွေးကြော အထိ စိမ့် ဝင် ချစ် ကြလေ

Nhalone swaykyaww aahti hcim win hcyit kyalay

Love each other deeply from the heart

မ ဖောက် ဖျက် နဲ့ အမျိုး ဂုဏ်တွေ

Ma hpout hpyet nae aamyoe gontway

Do not betray your own people (also translated as:  Do not violate the national dignity)

(from “A New 969 Song”)

<u>Listeners should not patronize Muslim-owned businesses</u>

The fourth main theme of anti-Muslim discourse in Myanmar refers back to the long-held conviction that Muslim foreigners aim to financially exploit Myanmar people. Patronizing Muslim businesses, in this understanding, amounts to disloyalty to the Myanmar ethnic group. In the same way that the discourse discusses marriage to Muslims, it posits economic engagement with Muslims as a “betrayal” of Buddhists and Buddhism:

ငါတို့ ပေး တဲ့ အမြတ် အ စွန်း တွေ နဲ့ တိုက် ဆောက် ကား စီး တက် ကြွ နေ

Ngarthoet payy tae aamyat aa hcunn tway nae tite sout karr hcee taat kywa nay

They are actively building new buildings and driving cars with the profits made from us

ငါတို့ ပေး တဲ့ ပိုက်ဆံ တွေ ကြောင့် ငါတို့ လူတွေ ဒုက ရောက်

Ngarthoet payy tae pitesan tway kyaung ngarthoet luutway dokekha yout

Our people suffer because of our own money that we give to them

မူဆလင် ဆိုင် မှာ ဝင် စျေး ဝယ် နေ ရင် အဲ့ ဒီ လူ က သစ္စာ ဖောက်

Muusalin sine mhar win hcyaay waal nay yin aae de luu ka sithcar hpout

If [a Buddhist] goes shopping in a Muslim shop, that person will be regarded unfaithful (as translated as, That person betrays Buddhist people)

(from “Losing One’s Nationality is a Concerning Issue”)

တို့ ညီအစ်ကိုတွေ တို့ အမျိုးကောင်း သား သမီး တွေသည် သ စ္စာ ဓိ ဌာန် ပြု ရ မည်

Thoet nyeaaitkotway thoet aamyoekaungg sarr samee twaysii sit hcar dhi htaan pyu ya mye

Brothers and sisters, good sons and daughters, we must take an oath

အမျိုး ဘာသာ သာသနာ သ စာရှိပါမည်

Aamyoe bharsar sarsanar sit hcar shiparmye

We shall be faithful to our religion and our nationality

ဘာသာ တူ ရာ ဆိုင်မှာသာ ဈေး ဝယ်ပါမည်

Bharsar tuu yar sinemharsar zaayy waalparmye

We shall only buy from the shops owned by those of same religion

ဘာသာ တူ ရာ ချင်း ဖြင့်သာ ဖူးစာ ရွေးပါမည်

Bharsar tuu yar hkyinn hpyingsar hpuuhcar ywayparmye

We shall choose to marry those of same religion

(from “Oath”)

Hateful lyrics contained in appealing pop songs not only reinforce the prejudiced thinking of those who listen to them, they also cause real harms to those targeted by them (Sorial 2015:306, 321). Simon Thompson, a scholar of political theory, points out that at least three harms can be and are suffered by the victims of religiously-focused hate speech (2012:226-228). First, targets of such speech develop fear that the violence outlined in hate speech will be aimed at them, and this fear undermines the self-confidence that is "a vital prerequisite to all other positive attitudes to the self" (2012:227). Second, targets of hate speech undergo psychological harms. Because human beings' sense of identity is bound up in how others perceive them and react to them, those who are on the receiving end of hate speech can feel their own sense of self-worth demeaned and may develop a sense of self-hatred. Third, targets of hate speech suffer harm to their social status. To be a member of a group that is collectively denigrated means that the group member may find it unduly challenging to participate equally in society; the hate speech "undermines their opportunities for self-realization" (2012:228). In conducting the research for this article, I caught a glimpse of the harms caused by hate speech targeting Myanmar Muslims. For example, I was accompanied by a young Muslim woman when I listened to the monk named Ashin Pyinya Siri (described above) explain how Muslims are "taking over" the country; she was visibly dejected afterward and I felt it necessary to apologize to her. Similarly, the two Muslim women who translated song texts and YouTube comments for this article sometimes demonstrated reluctance to articulate certain sentiments in English; on a number of occasions, I felt compelled to ask them if they were willing to continue.

The hate speech contained in Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs is undoubtedly harmful. But do these songs actually incite violence? Can the composers, performers, producers,

and distributors of these songs be held responsible, to any degree, for the genocidal crimes committed against Myanmar Muslims in recent years?

**Defining Incitement and Querying the Myanmar Example**

Scholarly and legal consensus on what constitutes incitement to violence, and incitement to genocide more specifically, is still "emerging" (Gordon 2008; Benesch 2004:64). Sarah Sorial recently defined incitement as "to stir up feelings of hatred, to discriminate, or in some cases, to cause violence against others" (2015:319). Legal scholar Susan Benesch developed a relatively strict test, which she calls the "reasonably possible consequences test," to identify which instances of hate speech rise to the level of incitement to genocide (2008:519). The common threads linking these and other examinations of incitement are first, that hate speech is not necessarily incitement, and second, that incitement does not require a direct outcome of violence – that is, that incitement is not determined by a direct cause-effect relationship by the inciting speech and subsequently occurring violence. Rather, it is "the *potential* of the communication to cause [violence or] genocide that makes it incitement" (Gordon 2008:878, emphasis mine).

In analyzing Burmese language anti-Muslim songs, I depend on the definition of incitement formulated by the judges of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in what is often referred to as the *Media* case. The judges' ruling in the *Media* case, issued in December 2003, is "a landmark in a developing body of international jurisprudence on incitement to genocide" (Benesch 2004:62). In litigating this case, the ICTR charged and convicted three defendants, two of whom co-founded a Rwandan radio station and one of whom was a newspaper editor, of "direct and public incitement to commit genocide" (Gordon 2008:874; see also International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda 2003). The ICTR decision "identified four criteria to determine whether hate speech, [disseminated via mass media],

constitutes the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression or the commission of criminal incitement: (1) purpose; (2) text; (3) context; (4) the relationship between speaker and subject" (Gordon 2008:904-905). In what follows, I apply these four criteria to anti-Muslim songs from Myanmar.

Purpose: As explained above, I was unable to interview any of the composers, producers or singers of Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs, and therefore I cannot quote any of them regarding their purposes or objectives in creating these songs. However, I argue that their purpose is clear and is revealed by the second criteria, their texts - noting that the ICTR made exactly the same argument in its *Media* case ruling (Gordon 2008:875). The creators of anti-Muslim hate songs seek to contribute to and reinforce the ethnonationalist, anti-Muslim discourse circulating in Myanmar since 2012. This discourse has been promoted by some Buddhist monks, including U Wirathu, and their allies lay Buddhist organizations. That the monks see the songs as helpful to their purpose is evident in the fact that one of the songs, "Oath," is often played at high volume prior to public preachings which are, in effect, anti-Muslim rallies. "Oath" and other anti-Muslim songs are broadcast by lay Buddhists also, when they march through their neighborhoods collecting donations for local monasteries and pagodas (field notes, February 22, 2018 and April 5, 2018).

Text: As the excerpts from the texts of the songs given above show, Burmese anti-Muslim hate songs consistently exhort listeners to protect "our" culture and religion. This may seem to be a rather innocuous call from the perspective of an outsider. However, as legal scholar Susan Benesch argues, when analyzing particular instances of speech, or texts, it is important to focus not on all the possible interpretations of those texts, but rather, what the audience is likely to understand by them (2008:520). The meaning of the language used in anti-Muslim hate songs

is abundantly clear to native Burmese speakers living in Myanmar today. The "we" who need to wake up, who must even be prepared to shed blood, are Burman Buddhists, and the "they" against whom "we" must protect ourselves are Muslims. "Protecting" Buddhism, in the texts of these songs, consists not of increasing one's devotion to Buddhist practices but rather of avoiding shopping at Muslim-owned businesses and of declining to marry a Muslim. Muslims are depicted as engaging in broad conspiracies to take over the country; "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue" even claims, without any basis, that mosques are offering financial incentives to Muslim men who marry unsuspecting Buddhist women. Most perniciously, the texts of the songs advance an exclusionary ideology that argues for excluding Muslims from Myanmar, and, possibly, from the land of the living.

Context: The circumstances surrounding the dissemination of a hateful text are central to determining that text's significance, as the ICTR *Media* case decision makes clear (Gordon 2008:876). Judith Butler further illuminates the importance of knowing and acknowledging the context of hateful speech in her critique of a 1993 United States Supreme Court decision (1997:51-59). In that case, the majority opinion stated that the burning of a cross was protected free speech, rather than an instance of injurious speech for which the perpetrator could be condemned by the court. The written decision disregarded the important contextual facts, namely, that a White teenager burned the cross on the front lawn of a Black family's home. As Butler points out, hateful statements and actions such as these "work" because of the history they draw upon (1997:51). The White teenager did not simply set a fire in a public place, but consciously invoked "the racist history of the convention of cross-burning by the Ku Klux Klan which marked, targeted, and hence, portended a further violence against a given addressee" (1997:55). Because the US Supreme Court justices did not take this contextual information into

consideration, they produced a decision in which a "racist injury [was] dignified as protected speech" (1997:64).

In the contemporary Myanmar context, Muslims are the target of ever-increasing discrimination, both legal and extra-legal. The national government's systematic refusal to grant many Muslims, including most Rohingya people, legal citizenship is one of the better-known manifestations of this discrimination (Parashar and Alam 2019). In 2015, the Myanmar Parliament passed a package of four "race and religion" laws that have been internationally condemned as discriminatory toward Myanmar Muslims. One of the laws requires that Buddhist women who wish to marry non-Buddhist men must apply for the right to do so, and wait for the approval of local authorities – approval which, we can safely assume, may be long in coming (Walton, McKay and Daw Khin Mar Mar Kyi 2015:37). This law was initially proposed by U Wirathu, and the text was drafted by lawyers sympathetic to the Buddhist ethnonationalist cause (Hayward and Frydenlund 2019:5); it was presented to Parliament along with the signatures of 2.5 million supporters (Walton, McKay and Daw Khin Mar Mar Kyi 2015:37). U Wirathu and his allies campaigned against the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 2015, and when the NLD won the election "Wirathu promised to bring the NLD down if they dared remove the laws" (Hayward and Frydenlund 2019:5). The months preceding the 2015 election revealed the dominant political culture in Myanmar: during the election campaign, the smear tactic of being "too Muslim-friendly" proved so effective that political parties disqualified many Muslim candidates who wished to stand for election (Hayward and Frydenlund 2019:5). MaBaTha, a Buddhist organization led by U Wirathu, also passed out stickers that were to be placed at the front entrance of businesses owned by Buddhists, so that consumers could target their shopping, avoiding Muslim-owned shops. In contrast to the 786 stickers favored by Muslims, these stickers

displayed the number 969 - a number which is religiously significant to Buddhists. This is the reason that the Buddhist ethnonationalist movement is often glossed as the 969 movement, and the reason that one of the anti-Muslim songs cited above is titled "A New 969 Song." The context for songs like "A New 969 Song" reveals that its words point not to some minority political position, or to the bizarre ideas of a splinter group, but rather to an anti-Muslim prejudice that is widespread and normalized among Myanmar Buddhists.

The relationship between speaker and subject: In its ruling on the *Media* case, the ICTR carefully distinguished between speakers who express a minority, dissenting position against a powerful state – whose right to dissent ought to be protected by free speech laws - and speakers who belong to the majority and who support government policies. The relationship between the speaker of an inciting text and the subject about which they are speaking is inextricably tied to the context in which the speech occurs: if the speaker belongs to a majority group and is criticizing members of a minority group, at a time when the majority group is actively engaged in discriminating against that minority group, it is much less likely that the speech could be characterized as protected free speech (Gordon 2004:173-174). Anti-Muslim hate songs from Myanmar are sung in Burmese, by native speakers of Burmese. From the evidence present in the song texts themselves, the song creators are very likely to be members of Myanmar's Buddhist majority, and they explicitly espouse discriminatory ideas maintained by many Myanmar legislators and religious leaders. The targets of the discriminatory ideas - and calls to violent action - are Muslims who constitute, as we have seen, a small minority in Myanmar. Furthermore, members of that Buddhist majority have violently persecuted communities belonging to the Muslim minority on numerous occasions during the past century. The songs are circulating at a time when Myanmar Muslims are again subject to violent attacks, are targeted by

discriminatory laws, and are vilified in Buddhist sermons and in a multitude of hateful postings on the internet. These songs are therefore "likely to exacerbate an already explosive situation" in the words of the ICTR (quoted in Gordon 2004:173), and they accentuate the threat posed by the majority to the minority.

In sum: Because the works in the corpus of Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs meet all four of the ICTR's criteria for defining inciting speech, it is clear that these songs are examples of incitement to violence.

**Listener responses to anti-Muslim hate songs**

Listeners are able to post comments underneath YouTube.com videos. The responses to Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs, captured in the comments, reveal that listeners have a variety of responses to the songs. The majority of the comments, however, are supportive of the songs and of the themes expressed in the songs' lyrics. This conclusion emerged from an analysis of the comments posted for the two of the songs, "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue," and "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted." I focused on the comment sections for these two songs because these songs were, by far, the most frequently commented upon by listeners. As of June 2019, there were 94 comments on "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue," and 43 comments on "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted." Almost all of the comments were written in Burmese; a small minority were written in English. I grouped the comments into five categories:

Table 1. Categories of Comments in Response to Anti-Muslim Songs

| Nature of comment | Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue (n=94) | | You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted (n=43) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Liking the song | 33% | n=31 | 21% | n=9 |
| Affirming message of the song | 22% | n=21 | 49% | n=21 |
| Explicit hate speech | 18% | n=17 | 7% | n=3 |
| Critiquing the song | 12% | n=11 | 0% | n=0 |
| Unclear | 15% | n=14 | 23% | n=10 |

A substantial number of the comments were unclear, meaning that they were so brief, and often misspelled, that it was impossible to make a fair determination of their meaning. Other comments that fell into this category were ambiguous, such as "I want to cry," which was Thander Oo's comment on "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue." Did Thander Oo want to cry because the lyrics of the song were so appalling? Or because, having listened carefully to the lyrics, Thander Oo was convinced that the song's message was true? Since it was impossible to answer this question, the comment was labeled unclear. A smaller percentage of comments about "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue" actually critiqued the song, contesting either its sound or its message. Examples include, "Shit song. Every fucking song is better than this music," (Khinmayme Laing) and "Just fuck this song," (ster demoe). It is noteworthy, however, that the critiques did not propose an alternative, more progressive understanding of the situation in contemporary Myanmar. One critiquing comment actually engaged in a different form of hate speech: "This singer's voice lacks energy; he sounds like an *a-chauk*" (Anders K Anderson). The word a-chauk is a Burmese term for a homosexual man;

like the word kala, it is now understood to be deeply insulting and is generally not used in polite conversation.

The majority of the commenters on both songs said either that they enjoyed the song and/or that they affirmed its message. Many of these comments were either anodyne references to liking the song and/or thanking the poster for posting it on YouTube.com. One comment in this category was "Thaddu, thaddu, thaddu," posted by Soe Soe in response "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted." This thrice-repeated word is a Burmese Buddhist blessing, usually pronounced by a monk over a layperson, expressing the monk's approval of that layperson's actions. Comments in a related category overtly affirmed the message of the song; sometimes, such comments echoed the kinds of lyrics heard across the corpus of anti-Muslim songs. For example, in commenting about "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted" MaMe love wrote, "Wake up. We should cherish Buddhism." Commenting about "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue," two commenters (Amyosaung Aung Kyi and Amyoti Tha Kyi) both wrote, "It is time for all Myanmar Buddhists to unite!" Zaw Myo, commenting on "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue"'s exhortation against marriage to a Muslim, wrote, "Women should be aware of this and control themselves."

In other comments the affirmations were more general, as in May Lay's comment on "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue": "Listen, listen Myanmar! All Myanmar, listen to this song." Still other affirmations were specific, and required detailed knowledge of the current context to decipher. Bo Bo Win Kyait wrote in his affirming comment, "It's time to teach all children about religion. For example there should be dhamma schools in all towns and villages." Dhamma schools, as mentioned above, have been promoted and supported by the same broad network of monks and laypeople who promote Myanmar's recent anti-Muslim discourse.

These schools do teach children about the basics of the Buddhism, but they mix this with a healthy dose of anti-Muslim rhetoric (Walton 2014). As one woman who attended a dhamma school in Mandalay Division in 2014 explained to me, the most memorable parts of the curriculum were, "Don't buy at Muslim shops. And the monks taught that 786 adds up to 21, which means that in the twenty-first century, Muslims will colonize Myanmar. Their goal is the Islamization of the whole world" (interview, Wai Wai Lwin, April 5, 2018).

Comments stating simply that the listener liked the song, or that s/he affirmed the message of the song, may seem innocuous on their face, but are better understood as part and parcel of the hate speech circulating in Myanmar today. To "cherish Buddhism," in this discourse, is not to peacefully love and promote one's own religion, but rather to uphold the importance of discriminating against people of other religions. Therefore, the comments in these two categories are linked, in theme and intent, to comments in the third category listed on the table above. Comments in the third category consist of explicit hate speech. For example, after posting an affirming comment (cited above), Soe Soe wrote another comment in response to "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted": "Kick all the kala dogs out of our country." In Myanmar, dogs are feral animals. Only the most elite people in the country have pet dogs; even in the biggest cities, it is still common to encounter feral dogs in packs roaming the streets, many of them seemingly injured and hungry. For a Burmese speaker, to equate a group of people with dogs is to dehumanize them in dramatic fashion. Soe Soe's comment also underlines the exclusionary ideology ("Kick them out of our country") at the heart of the anti-Muslim discourse. Explicitly hateful comments posted in response to "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue" use similar language, repeating both the ethnic slur and the exclusionary language: "Dog-kala and dog-Christian do not belong in our land" (Ko Twe); "We can already

see the customs of the kala dogs. The whole world knows their rude actions. Muslims are the shit of the whole world" (Kyaw Comet); "Myanmar women, you should not marry dogs, no matter how poor you are" (Vj Jeedphone); and "Kill all of the kala" (Yo Myanmar).

Taken together, as I argue they should be, the comments in the first three categories listed on the table above constitute the majority of comments made about Burmese language anti-Muslim songs. Comments which profess to like the song, those which affirm its message, and those which engage in explicit hate speech make up 73% of the comments responding to "Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue." Similarly, comments in these three categories make up 76% of the comments left in response to "You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted." Stated most generally, roughly three quarters of the written internet responses to anti-Muslim hate songs support those songs in some way.

Furthermore, listener responses reveal the power of anti-Muslim hate songs. The comments are responses to the songs; comments are posted online only after listeners hear the songs. As is explained above, the songs' lyrics constitute incitement to genocidal violence according to the definition of the incitement articulated by the ICTR. By virtue of being posted on YouTube.com and by inviting comments, the songs are also provoking additional inciting speech among the commenters. The songs are not only part of a hateful discourse, they are also extending that discourse by sparking more hateful speech. Said another way: the makers and promoters of these songs are inciting violence against Myanmar Muslims not only by their own words (in their songs), but also by spurring listeners on to articulate more inciting speech.

**Conclusion**

It would be easy to dismiss a small corpus of pop songs as insignificant; indeed, that was a fatal mistake made by international observers, who were well aware of three hate songs being broadcast daily on Rwandan national radio, in the months leading up to the Rwandan genocide (McCoy 2009:94). Myanmar's anti-Muslim hate songs are one facet of broader campaign, which includes speeches, videos, and internet postings, that continues to incite violence against Muslim people. Incitement is a "hallmark of genocide" (Benesch 2004:63) and a crucial "early warning indicator" that genocide is about to occur (Oberschall 2000:2). More specifically, the existence of an exclusionary ideology articulated and disseminated in inciting texts is an important precursor to genocide (Harff 2003:63). The relevance of an exclusionary ideology has been highlighted by leading genocide scholar Barbara Harff, who found that countries in which it is present are 2.5 times more likely to move toward genocide than countries with no such ideology (2003:66). Using her own model, which gives relative weight to a number of risk factors for genocide, in 2012 Harff published a list of countries that were at risk of genocide. The country at the very top of her list - the country with the very highest "risk index score" - was Myanmar (2012:55). The genocidal violence which exploded later that year in Myanmar is abundant evidence of the predictive strength of Harff's model. Her repeated cautions about exclusionary ideology, which we hear articulated at length in Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs, remind us of the significance of the songs.

These songs also enflame further hateful sentiment among Myanmar Buddhists. This is evident in the dehumanizing comments that YouTube listeners make about the songs. Genocide Watch identifies dehumanization as one of the ten stages of genocide, and explains the purpose of it: "Dehumanization overcomes the normal human revulsion against murder. At this stage, hate propaganda in print and on hate radios is used to vilify the victim group. The majority group

is taught to regard the other group as less than human, and even alien to their society" (Stanton 2016; see also Oberschall 2000:2). Condoning violence and murder is counter to the prevailing morality in all human socities, and dehumanizing speech is therefore a necessary forerunner to genocidal violence: "The dominant group must come to see its putative victims as mortal threats (since killing can then be rationalized as self-defense), or as subhuman (as insects or animals), or both" (Benesch 2004:63). Dehumanizing comments on YouTube.com contribute to the larger hate speech campaign currently percolating in Myanmar, helping to convince lay Buddhists to condone the violent persecution of, and even killing of, their Muslim countrymen.

YouTube.com announced that, as of December 2018, the company is making better efforts to remove "violative content" and "violative comments" (YouTube Official Blog 2018). As of the writing of this article, these efforts have not extended to the Burmese language anti-Muslim hate songs and their associated hateful comments. The songs are therefore continuing to contribute to Myanmar's cyber-space, which is not "an isolated domain of social action, but rather...an extension of pre-existing relationships, networks, and cultural practices" (McCarthy 2018:102). Given that internet usage is increasing rapidly in Myanmar, it is vitally important to understand how the current anti-Muslim campaign is being furthered in that cyber-space. Although Facebook.com has made some progress in quashing the anti-Muslim hate speech which appears on their platform, YouTube.com continues to host songs which incite violence against Myanmar Muslims. These songs provoke further hate speech in their comment sections.

This article went to press in early 2021, as unfolding events highlighted the issues raised in this article. First, political leaders in the United States debated whether or not the former President had incited a mob which attacked the seat of government in order to overturn the results of a federal election. Fearing future violence, major social media companies removed the

President and some of his followers from their online platforms, effectively adjudicating the debate (BBC News 2021). The actions of these companies, reported around the world, were a powerful reminder that inciting speech communicated via the internet is a major focus of concern for many. Second, Myanmar experienced a military coup, and the coup leaders who took control of the national government immediately began instituting restrictions on internet access (Beech and Mozur 2021; Beech 2021). As I concluded this article, it was unclear to what extent the Youtube videos described here would continue to be available to Myanmar citizens. It was also impossible to predict how those controlling the levers of power would pursue the anti-Muslim campaign of the previous decade. Nevertheless, I hope that the particulars of this study will remain relevant to my fellow scholars. The field of ethnomusicology is well positioned to undertake further investigations of musics' and musicians' roles in inciting violence elsewhere in the world, and elsewhere on the internet. In so doing, ethnomusicologists will respond to one of the most pressing issues of our time.

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**Discography**

"You Should Not Be Cold-Hearted": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd93Oh6NGYw

"Brave-Hearted Man": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsSpS8oEKHE

"Losing One's Nationality is a Concerning Issue":

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3bzk9mImYE

"Oath": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyRNSwY5Dkw

"Wirathu": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzvotssVgUU

"A New 969 Song": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sru69Ui8-Yg

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